

Message Text

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TAGS : PINT, FR
SUBJECT : THE FRENCH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS - ISSUES
AND OUTLOOK

SUMMARY :

----- AFTER ANALYSING THE PRESENT ELECTIONS CAMPAIGNS
THROUGHOUT THE LYON CONSULAR DISTRICT - INCLUDING THE
RHONE-ALPS REGION, THE AUVERGNE AND THE MAJOR PART OF
BURGUNDY - TO EXAMINE THE ISSUES, WHETHER SOCIAL,
ECONOMIC, OR ENVIRONMENTAL, AND STUDY THE BATTLE OF
FIGURES AND PROGRAMS BETWEEN THE OPPOSING CAMPS,
THE CONCLUSION IS INESCAPABLE THAT THE KEY ISSUE
OF THIS ELECTION IS THE CHOICE OF SOCIETY THE
FRENCH WANT FOR THEMSELVES. THIS IS WHY UNITY AND COHESION
ARE OF SUCH CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE AND MAY SWING THE OUTCOME
IN EITHER DIRECTION. THE OUTLOOK IN THIS DISTRICT IS
FOR SUBSTANTIAL GAINS BY THE LEFT.
END SUMMARY

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1. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES

THE PRESENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION AND THE
OUTLOOK FOR THE IMMEDIATE YEARS AHEAD HAVE CREATED
SUBSTANTIAL UNCERTAINTIES WHICH IN TURN HAVE GENERATED
PROFOUND WISHES FOR CHANGE. AFTER MORE THAN TWO YEARS
OF ECONOMIC STAGNATION, EVEN THOUGH THERE REMAIN

SOME POCKETS OF RELATIVE WELL-BEING THROUGHOUT THIS NORMALLY PROSPEROUS DISTRICT, THE FEAR OF CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT SLUGGISHNESS DOMINATES THE EARLY WEEKS OF 1978. A NUMBER OF MAJOR INDUSTRIES IN THE DISTRICT ARE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED AND REMAIN THE SUBJECT OF WEEKLY AND SOMETIMES DAILY PRESS ATTENTION. AMONGST THESE ARE THE BERLIET TRUCK FACTORY RECENTLY MERGED WITH THE RENAULT TRUCK DIVISION SAVIEM, RHONE-POULENC, PRODUCER OF CHEMICALS AND TEXTILES, AND MANUFRACTANCE, MANUFACTURER OF ARMS, BICYCLES AND SPORTING GOODS AND ALSO ONE OF FRANCE S LARGEST MAIL-ORDER HOUSES. CURRENT AND POTENTIAL LAY-OFFS IN THE NEAR FUTURE MAY REACH AS MANY AS TEN THOUSAND WORKERS IN THESE COMPANIES ALONE, CASTING A PALL OVER THE AFFECTED CITIES, PRINCIPALLY LYON AND ST-ETIENNE. IN ANOTHER PROVINCIAL CAPITAL, CLERMONT-FERRAND, CONTINUING STRIKES AT THE PLANT OF THE PRINCIPAL EMPLOYER, THE MICHELIN TIRE COMPANY ADD TO THE OVERALL SOCIAL UNREST.

THUS UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE DISTRICT REMAINS HIGH AT AROUND 10 O/O, PRODUCTION FALTERS, GROWTH HAS BARELY ATTAINED A RATE OF 3 O/O, WHILE PRICES ARE UP BY 9.4 O/O. THE BARRE PLAN IS PERCEIVED HERE TO BE ONLY marginally EFFECTIVE, MOSTLY IN THE EXPORT SECTOR AND IN REDUCTION OF THE BALANCE OF TRADE DEFICIT. IT IS BUT LITTLE UNCLASSIFIED

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CREDITED, HOWEVER, WITH CONTAINING INFLATION AND REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT.

IN THIS MOROSE ATMOSPHERE, THE ELECTION STRUGGLE HAS GOTTEN OF TO A START WITH A BATTLE BETWEEN FIGURES AND PROGRAMS. THE FIGURES DEAL WITH THE POTENTIAL BUDGETARY DEFICIT IN THE CASE OF VICTORY BY ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER. THE SOCIALISTS HOLD THAT THE BARRE PROGRAM WILL LEAD TO A DEFICIT OF 73 BILLION FRANCS, WHILE THE MAJORITY ADMITS TO A DEFICIT OF ONLY 22 BILLION FRANCS. MOST REGIONAL ECONOMIC OBSERVERS COMMENT THAT WHILE THE PROGRAM OF THE LEFT ENVISAGES EXCESSIVE EXPENDITURES , THE BARRE PLAN COULD JUST ABOUT BE SUPPORTED BY THE FRENCH ECONOMY.

THE VOTERS APPEAR LESS THAN CONVINCED BY ALL THE ARITHMETIC, BUT REMAIN CONSCIOUS OF PERSISTANT INFLATOON, UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL UNREST. THEY ARE MOSTLY INTERESTED IN A HIGHER MINIMUM WAGE, INCREASED PAY AND ALLOWANCES, A BETTER RETIREMENT PLAN AND THE CREATION OF NEW JOBS LEADING TO EMPLOYMENT SECURITY FOR ALL.

2. ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

THE INCREASING STRENGTH OF THE ECOLOGISTS IN THIS CONSULAR DISTRICT ESSENTIALLY CAN BE SEEN AS A NATURAL REACTION TO PROFOUND AND RAPID TRANSITION FROM A LARGELY AGRARIAN-RURAL LIFESTYLE TO A PREDOMINANTLY INDUSTRIAL-URBAN SOCIETY. SUPERIMPOSED ON THIS UNDERLYING DESIRE FOR CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF AN ENVIRONMENT COMPRISING THE ALPS AND THE MASSIF CENTRAL IS THE VERVENT OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENT. LAST SUMMER S SERIOUS DEMONSTRATIONS AT THE CREYS-MALVILLE NUCLEAR PLANT ARE BROUGHT UP ONCE AGAIN IN THIS PRE-ELECTION PERIOD. IN THE ISERE DEPARTMENT, THE ECOLOGISTS ARE TAKING THE GRENOBLE INSTITUTE FOR NUCLEAR
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RESEARCH TO COURT FOR POLLUTION OF UNDERGROUND WATER LEVELS THEY ALLEGE CAUSED BY WASTE MATERIALS FROM THE INSTITUTE S NUCLEAR REACTOR. IN RECENT STATEMENTS, PHILIPPE LEBRETON, REGIONAL LEADER OF THE ECOLOGIST MOVEMENT, STRONGLY CRITICIZED BOTH THE P.C. AND THE P.S. FOR THEIR POSITIONS ON NUCLEAR ENERGY AND THE FORCE DE FRAPPE (NUCLEAR STRIKE FORCE) AND INDICATED THAT THE ECOLOGISTS WERE NOT ALLIED TO EITHER SIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

3. CHOICE OF SOCIETY THE KEY ISSUE

AFTER EXAMINING THE VARIOUS PROGRAMS AND ISSUES ADVANCED, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT IN MARCH, 1978 THE FRENCH VOTERS ARE ONCE AGAIN SQUARELY FACED BY THE CHOICE OF THE KIND OF SOCIETY THEY WISH TO LIVE IN: THAT OF THE PRESENT MAJORITY WITH AN OPEN, COMPETITIVE ECONOMY OR THAT PROPOSED BY THE SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION WHICH IMPLIES LARGE SCALE NATIONALIZATIONS AND HEAVY GOVERNMENT DOMINANCE OF PRIVATE ENTREPRISE AS WELL AS INDIVIDUALS.

4. CURRENT OUTLOOK IN LYON DISTRICT

OF THE SIXTY-SIX DEPUTY CAMPAIGNS IN THE LYON CONSULAR DISTRICT, THE OUTCOME OF AT LEAST TWENTY IS IN REAL DOUBT. THE MAJORITY CAN ONLY BE SURE OF CONSERVING SOME TWENTY EIGHT SEATS OF ITS PRESENT FORTY EIGHT. THE LEFT, WHICH PRESENTLY HOLDS ONLY EIGHTEEN SEATS, WILL NOT ONLY CERTAINLY WIN THAT MANY, BUT WILL LIKELY GAIN A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF THOSE IN DOUBT. THUS THE DISTRICT WILL ONCE AGAIN REGISTER A DECIDED SWING TO THE LEFT, PARTICULARLY IN THE MOST HEAVY POPULATED
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RHONE DEPARTMENT. SUBSEQUENT REPORTS WILL DEAL WITH
THE MORE INTERESTING CONTESTS.
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